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INTRODUCTION

It's not often that a individual television series can take credit for having made a profound impact on both the way stories are told and and the way shows are produced in the medium today. Especially one that is syndicated and science fiction as well.

Babylon 5 -- created by J. Michael Straczynski (the only individual selected by *Newsweek* from the ranks of the entertainment industry to appear on its "50 for the Future" list of the "most influential thinkers-innovators who will shape our lives as we move into the 21st century") -- falls within that category.

Within these pages you will read about how this unique series -- presently in its third season of syndication through Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution -- has pioneered many historic *firsts* in American television, including as...

- ***The first American television series presented as an epic saga -- with a beginning, middle, and end in the tradition of a great literary novel.***
- ***The first series to revolutionize the way state-of-the-art special visual effects are produced on television through the use of inexpensive desktop computers and off-the-shelf software.***
- ***The first science fiction series in which all of the technology incorporated in the story -- other than its unique "jumpgates" -- are based on real science.***
- ***The first time one individual has written a full 22-episode season for for a one-hour dramatic series.***
- ***The first time that the Virtual Studio concept has been used to link key members of the production team around the world via the Internet and other means for a television series.***

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Certainly, few syndicated series have been as honored in such a short period of time. To date, **Babylon 5** has received...

- Two Emmy Awards (for Special Visual Effects in 1993 and Makeup in 1994)
- Three Emmy nominations (for Cinematography, Makeup, and Hairstyling, all in 1995)
- The 1994 Space Frontier Foundation Award for "Best Vision of the Future" from the National Association of Space Scientists, Astronauts and Engineers
- The 1994 Jewish Televimage Award
- A Hugo Award nomination from the World Science Fiction Association
- Five English Media Cult TV Awards from England (including for "Best New Series" in 1994)
- A Sci-Fi Universe 1995 Reader's Choice Award ("Best Actor in a TV Series") for star Bruce Boxleitner (shared with David Duchovny of "The X-Files")

*

Babylon 5 stars Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian, Jerry Doyle, and Mira Furlan. Richard Biggs, Bill Mumy, Jason Carter, Stephen Furst, and Jeff Conaway also star, with Peter Jurasik as "Londo" and Andreas Katsulas as "G-Kar."

Produced by Babylonian Productions, Inc., **Babylon 5** is distributed by Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution. Douglas Netter and J. Michael Straczynski are the executive producers, and John Copeland is the producer. Harlan Ellison serves as a creative consultant.



THE *BABYLON 5* PHENOMENON

■ *Babylon 5* ranks **#6 in the delivery of Men 18-49 and Men 25-54** out of 19 action hour programs*, and **#1 in the delivery of Men 18-49 and Men 25-54 VPVHs** among all action hour dramas**. (Sources: *NSS SEASON-TO-DATE 9/4/95-3/17/96; **NSS. 9/25/95-2/11/96)

■ In Viewers for Quality Television's (VQT) monthly surveys, *Babylon 5* has regularly ranked high -- indeed, finishing #8 recently in a four-way tie, well ahead of every other science fiction show except "The X-Files."

■ The 1995 3rd Annual Sci-Fi Fantasy TV's Internet survey of nine newsgroups ranked *Babylon 5* #1 among favorite shows -- followed by "The X-Files" at #2 and "Star Trek: The Next Generation" at #3.

■ A zealous fan recently spent considerable time on the Net tracking the number of times that *Babylon 5* references could be found on the Web's some 21 million pages. The result? 20,000 pages that included *Babylon 5*, compared to 90,000 pages for the entire "Star Trek" legacy, 10,000 pages for "Star Trek: Deep Space 9," and 10,000 pages for "Hercules." Pretty good for a show that had to create its own tradition!

Fans Of All Stripes:

■ A representative of Army Broadcasting told *Babylon 5*'s producers that the episode, "Eyes," was reviewed in the Army Ops. Center at the Pentagon for insight into military procedure and internal affairs. She also said that the Secret Service ran abstract psychological profiles on the characters in this episode, just as they do for criminals and terrorists, to serve as a research model.

■ Producer John Copeland says he's been informed that the Defense Department refers to *Babylon 5* as "Force Multiplier" for its morale-boosting effect on the troops -- particularly those units stationed in remote areas like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

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- Also according to information conveyed to the producers, the Naval Intelligence Department constructed a test model for how computer networks are susceptible to compromise, and named each computer in the study after a **Babylon 5** character. "And guess which one got compromised first," Copeland reports with amusement. "Londo."

- The crew of the remote McMurdo military outpost in Antarctica have friends tape the show back in the States and ship it up in their twice-yearly supplies drop. **Babylon 5** has also been adopted by Army Apache and Cobra units stationed at Fort Bragg and the crews of several aircraft carriers, including the U.S.S. Independence. As well, the producers have heard from a convent of nuns, college students, senior citizens, House Sciences Committee members, religious leaders, and "lots of ordinary folk. It's an incredibly diverse audience," says creator and executive producer J. Michael Straczynski. "They all seem to respond to the same thing, which is to see an honest-to-God saga on television."

A Global Following

- **Babylon 5** is carried by networks in over 20 countries, including the U.K., Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Greece, Italy, Israel, Jordan, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Phillipines, Portugal, Puerto Rico, and such unlikely places as Trinidad, Tobago, and Malaysia. "Internationally, we are a *big* success story," says executive producer Douglas Netter, noting that the show is in the Top Ten programs in England, where it is aired by Channel 4.

Fans Who Really Care

- When a television station in Greece declared bankruptcy last year and shut down literally in the middle of airing a **Babylon 5** episode, hundreds of protestors with placards marched in front of the station the next day -- demanding that it return to the airwaves just long enough to finish showing the aborted episode. While they were not successful, the publicity did result in their getting another station to pick up the series.

- In Canada's British Columbia, "a small, but vocal core of fans banded together on the Internet (the Vancouver **Babylon 5** UseNet group is one of the most active TV groups on the local net) and lobbied CHEK to pick the show up for the third season," reported *Vancouver Sun* television writer Alex Strachan in December 1995, adding that "the Victoria station saw the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone:

Resurrect *Babylon 5*, mollify the show's UseNet junkies, and fill a hole on Thursday nights."

- *San Jose Mercury News* television writer Mike Antonucci also reported in 1995 that the viewers in his area were not happy about the final episodes of season two airing in the U.K. months before the U.S. "Not only did information about the episodes start to percolate on the Internet, but U.S. addicts wanted tapes (and right away, thank you). One Bay Area die-hard tells me that fans have gathered for home showings of said tapes, creating little festivals at which cultists grumbled about their second-nation status."

- Among the scores of fan clubs around the world that have sprouted up during the last four years has been the UK Fan Club, which has shown its appreciation for the series by mounting the first-ever *Babylon 5* convention in September 1995, with another even-larger event (Babcom '96) planned for June 1996, to be attended by most of the show's stars.

- Numerous *Babylon 5* fan clubs have mounted their own Internet Web pages and created e-mail newsletters to keep local members informed of show developments -- and to mount crusades for better time periods an/or renewals when necessary.

A Major Presence on the Internet

- *Babylon 5* is one of the most celebrated television shows on the Internet today -- with 265 fan-mounted Web sites, its own official home page, and daily online discussions on CompuServe, GEnie, Bix, Fidonet, and USENET. The show has become so popular on BBSes, in fact, USENET's rec.arts.sf.tv.babylon5 area recorded over 100,000 messages in 1995 alone. "We went from 0 to becoming the 18th biggest group on the entire Internet within a period of a couple of months," says Straczynski.

- A dedicated Internet navigator since 1984 (when he became the first television writer on CompuServe), Straczynski is in fact the only television executive who interacts regularly with fans, consistently putting in three to four hours a day -- seven days a week -- reading the some 500 *Babylon 5*-related daily postings put up by fans.

Why? "Because on the nets, you get questions you never dreamed of, which helps me strengthen my characters and the world of the show," says Straczynski -- who has written a phenomenal 49 of the show's 66 total episodes to date (including the entire third season). "It's been an interesting experiment in truly interactive TV.

A viewer can watch our show and 10 minutes later be online with the person who wrote it, created it, and produced it. And do the same thing next week, and the week thereafter. I think it's helped to demystify TV, which was one of my goals."

■ "J. Michael Straczynski is changing not only the way people look at television, but far, far, far more importantly, the way TV looks at people. In fact, he seems to be boldly going where no producer has gone before -- to the fans, via the Internet," reported Brad Bailey in *Dallas' Arts & Entertainment Weekly* in March 1995.

Bailey also related how he had "sent up a public post to the Netheads at large, timidly offering the fact that I was a writer friendly to the show who was looking into the *Babylon 5* phenom as a topic for a possible article.

"In fact, the sheer volume of viewer response from Netheads who are also Bab5heads was nothing less than amazing, in and of itself: some 250,000 bytes, roughly 50,000 words...of intelligent, articulate, well-thought-out praise for the show and its creator.

"I had also told those folks that I would be willing to do them the hugely condescending favor of asking any questions that they might want to forward along to Big Writer Me, just on the off chance that, waving my press card and touting my Representative of the People status, I would be able to rat-terrier Straczynski's people into maybe getting to do at least a short interview. As regards this Once-in-a-Lifetime Offer, I got numerous responses, but none like I expected.

"As David Bilek put it: 'First off, in regards to getting 'some sort of access' to the executive producer, Joe Straczynski, you don't need to go to all that trouble. He reads and responds regularly to the Babylon 5 newsgroup, and the Babylon 5 category on GEnie, home of the Grid Epsilon Irregulars. So, if you have questions for the guy, just send them to him.'"

Bailey did, and got back 15,000 bytes (or 3,000 words) from JMS in response to his questions.

An Expanding Universe of B5 Merchandise

Following are only a few of the exciting collectibles currently available. Internet users: *The Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5: Resources: Products* maintains an updated list of current and upcoming items (<http://www.hyperion.com/lurker.html>).

■ **The *Babylon 5* Original Soundtrack**

Composer Christopher Franke, one of the pioneers of electronic music and a former member of Tangerine Dream, has reorchestrated his original, powerful scores and primary themes for *B5* into four uninterrupted suites, merging the worlds of classical and electronic music. Audio clips available for downloading from Sonic Images Internet site: <http://sonicimages.com>.

Available in compact disc from major retail outlets, Internet virtual stores, or directly from Sonic Images (213-650-4400).

■ **The *Babylon 5* Limited Edition CD-ROM Entertainment Utility**

Contains a hi-tech screen saver -- featuring actual video clips from the series -- and over 100 colorful images, 50 AudioClips™, 30 Wallpaper Images, Q Sound™ enhanced. (For Windows 3.1 or later; a Macintosh version soon to be released.)

Available from SoundSource Interactive (800-877-4778).

■ ***Babylon 5* Character Costumes and Masks**

Four costumes and two masks currently available from Uncomyn Gifts (800-875-6926 or 360-866-6674).

■ ***Babylon 5* Micro Machines**

Two new 3-pack collections -- featuring 6 new space vehicles -- coming April 1996, in addition to the four continuing collections.

Available at all major toy retailers.



PIONEERING A NEW FRONTIER IN TELEVISION PRODUCTION:

The Making of "Babylon 5"

In 1986, a 32-year-old by the name of J. Michael Straczynski had a unique vision: a saga for television that would take five years to tell, and would feature state of the art effects as well as a huge cast of characters who would change and grow as empires rose and fell around them.

His prospects of getting it mounted were daunting, for a myriad of reasons...

A 5-year epic with a beginning, middle, and end in which each episode would be like a chapter in a book, and each season another volume in a continuing story? It had never been done on American television, except as a short-term mini-series. Only the British had ever attempted it, with "The Prisoner" (which lasted a mere 18 episodes) and to a lesser extent with "Blake's 7" and "The Who."

Stunning visual effects combined with live action as realistic as anything seen in motion pictures -- but produced on a limited television budget? No one had ever tried it, much less without traditional motion control cameras, intricate models, and a mega-budget to underwrite the thousands of hours necessary to create sequences that lasted only a few minutes on the screen.

Another science fiction series? The statistics were ruthless: only a handful of sci-fi series had lasted three seasons or more during the last four decades; 98% of all sci-fi series have been canceled before the third season; of the one or two new sci-fi shows typically launched each year, few survive beyond a few months. Even the original "Star Trek," which debuted in 1966, finally succumbed to a lack of ratings by 1969, after enduring a barrage of critical attack as a poor imitation of "Lost In Space."

Amazingly, Straczynski finally succeeded -- although it would take an epic effort before his show called *Babylon 5* would finally reach the small screen as a two-

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hour TV movie in February 1993, and a year later before his 5-year saga began unfolding in the form of a weekly series.

How the Odyssey Began

Rarely has a television series been conceived with as much dedication to forging new frontiers within the medium.

"The fact is that I grew up a fan of science fiction -- particularly of the sagas: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the *Dune* books, the *Lensman* books, *Childhood's End* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*," says Straczynski.

"So I wanted to do for television what I grew up reading in those great sagas. And the reality is that no one in American television had ever tried to do a real honest-to-God saga for television -- with a beginning, middle, and end over a period of, say, five years: where the first year is equal to the introduction you get in a novel; the second year is the rising action; the third year is the complication, and so on, with foreshadows and back references and character changes.

"Although the British had done it with 'The Prisoner,' and to a lesser extent with 'Blake's 7' and 'Dr. Who,' no one in this country had ever applied a strict, literary novel technique to television."

But Straczynski had other concerns as well, resulting from the several years he had already spent working in television as a staff writer and story editor on a number of animated and live action series.

"My perception was that as much as one-third of any TV series budget is wasted on poor planning and short script deadlines. Typically, a script is delivered only days before it's going to be shot, and often just 24 hours in advance. There's even been cases where pages are landing on the set as the cameras are rolling. As a result, the crew is working all night making sets and costumes, and getting paid time and a half. Add to that the cost of complex special effects, prosthetics, elaborate sets and alien costumes, and science fiction shows quickly become the worst offenders.

"So I thought, there's got to be a better, smarter way of doing this -- of changing the fundamental way television is produced, and how would I do that?" Straczynski says.

That's when he began thinking about what it would take "to design a show along more logical lines for science fiction, since the major source of expense is creating new worlds every week. I thought about the sorts of shows I like in *tone*... 'Hill Street Blues,' 'St. Elsewhere,' even "M*A*S*H," and in each case, there was a stationary locale and your stories come to you. In other words, where people in trouble come to you."

From there, he recalled what he had read about post-World War II Germany, "where American, French and British forces (and, I think, some Russian) patrolled equally to make sure that no one side got the upper hand," as well as "the early free-ports of the 19th century, which were noted for some pretty rough characters, for adventure, for intrigue and smuggling.

"Put those various elements together...and you've got *Babylon 5*," he explains of his decision to anchor his story on a futuristic United Nations-like space station in which some quarter-million humans and aliens of diverse cultures and competing ambitions attempt to negotiate their differences in neutral territory from episode to episode.

Finally, there was the ultimate challenge that any series bearing his name would have to meet -- simply because Straczynski is by nature both a literary disciple and a bottom-line pragmatist at heart.

"I'd seen so many science fiction shows by then that backed into a budget, and thus went forever *over* budget, that I wanted to challenge myself to develop a show that met several important criteria," he says.

"1) It would have to be good science fiction. 2) It would have to be good *television*, and rarely are science-fiction shows both good sci-fi *and* good TV; they're generally one or the other. 3) It would have to take an adult approach to science fiction, and attempt to do for television sci-fi what 'Hill Street Blues' did for cop shows. 4) It would have to be affordable and done on a reasonable budget. 5) It would have to look unlike anything ever seen before on TV, and present not just individual stories, but present those stories against a much broader canvas."

It was a big agenda, but the idea finally struck. "One day, literally, I was noodling around with this, and the entire story line just came in a flash. I saw the whole five year story in just one incredible revelation," he says of that moment in 1986. "Then I spent the next two years trying to write down what I saw in that one moment of perfect clarity."

Getting Babylon 5 Made

After writing the series bible (that includes the 5-year story arc which *only* Straczynski is privy to) and a two-hour screenplay, he presented the idea to Douglas Netter and John Copeland. The former head of the MGM studios, Netter had been the executive producer and Copeland the producer of "Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future," the syndicated science fiction series for which Straczynski served as story editor (as well as writer on 11 episodes) in 1986-87.

"Joe came to John and I right after we finished 'Captain Power' and said, 'I've got an idea for a science fiction show that can be contained, that we can do for a price, that has the potential to be greater than science fiction shows have been,'" Netter says. "But it took us six years from that point to get the pilot made."

The problem was, Netter recalls, that "the networks had had science fiction pitched to them before, along with the caveat, 'We can do this for a reasonable price.' Of course, that was one of the great lies in Hollywood. And even though John and I had an excellent reputation for bringing shows in under budget and on time, as soon as they heard about big effects, red flags would go up in their minds. They were afraid that any attempt to do a science fiction show on a tight budget might result in inferior production values."

And like everyone else, Warner Bros. didn't see how a high-quality show could be done on a cut-rate budget. "They said, 'Well, if you are going to do it for that, this stuff will look terrible.' And we said, 'No, it won't,'" Netter remembers. To prove their point, Straczynski, Netter, and Copeland had Ron Thornton -- who had worked with them on "Captain Power" and subsequently pioneered the use of CGI effects on an Amiga computer -- produce a startling 50-second sequence featuring a computer-generated space ship being tracked from far in the distance to its arrival at the space station's docking bay, all in one shot.

When they showed it to a group of Warner Bros. Executives and TV station heads who were part of PTEN, the reaction was everything they had hoped for: "When it was over, they said, 'We've got to see that again!'" Netter recalls. "And then when we said, 'We did it on a desktop computer,' they were just like flabbergasted."

As a result, they finally got their production deal, and *Babylon 5* debuted as a two-hour pilot movie during the week of February 22, 1993, to an impressive 10.3 GAA national rating. Just the month before, Paramount (one of the many studios they had pitched years before) also launched "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine," another story anchored on a stationary space station. Of the much-noted coincidence, Netter says, "We were in development long before 'Deep Space Nine.'"

Particularly impressive is the fact that *Babylon 5* is produced "with syndication dollars," Copeland stresses. "This show is not done at a deficit. It pays for itself strictly out of the advertising dollars generated every year. And I don't know anybody else out there who's doing this exciting of stuff with the same economic realities we're dealing with. We're spending half of what an episode of 'Star Trek' costs, and one-third of an episode of 'Space: Above and Beyond.'"

"We're doing what no one else is doing in town," adds Straczynski, "which is taking full advantage of the latest technology. We have almost a completely-digitalized studio, which no one else has at this point.

"In addition, we plan things out way ahead of time. Before we roll one frame of film, we know what stories we're going to be doing that year, what sets we're going to have to construct, what effects we're going to need, and we always have a minimum of three scripts in hand. So this gives all the different parties concerned enough time to sit down and design things and build things properly, without having to rush. As a result, we're not paying 24 hours of overtime to get things done in time. It comes down basically to planning, which no one else does in this town."

Babylon 5's Revolutionary Special Effects

In 1964, "Star Trek" presented what were then fantastic new images of planets and space vessels unlike anything seen before. In 1977, "Star Wars" used what was *then* state-of-the-art technology to create amazing space battle scenes -- involving motion control cameras, intricate models, and untold months of shooting time to complete sequences that would last mere minutes. In 1994, *Babylon 5* pioneered the newest breakthrough in special visual effects as the first science fiction show to produce astonishing outer space scenes *without* models or cameras.

Certainly, computer technology for producing effects is no longer the novelty that it once was. Hardly a motion picture is made today in which at least one scene isn't enhanced electronically. The difference between *Babylon 5* and other effects-laden TV shows and movies is that "we were the first to do everything with desktop computers," says Copeland of the show's Emmy Award-winning special visual effects.

"We don't use expensive silicon graphics machines. We don't use high-end software. Initially all the 3-D computer animation was done on Amigas using the Video Toaster. Today, however, all the 3-D computer animation is done on PC

clones and DEC Alpha platforms running on a readily available piece of software called LightWave 3-D. LightWave was originally part of the Video Toaster, but has been ported out as a software program available for many different computer platforms.

"The matte paintings are done in a combination of Photo Shop and Electric Image. We do all our compositing in MacIntoshes. We edit on Avids. We even assemble the show in a computer; we don't do it in a regular video online bay anymore," Copeland continues. "And everything we use is available down at your friendly local computer store. We just push it a little harder."

Besides Thornton's breakthrough experiments with an Amiga in combination with New Tek's Video Toaster in the early 1990s, Copeland had already been working with computer-generated effects for "Captain Power" in 1986. "A year before they started shooting 'Roger Rabbit,' two of the creatures in our series were completely done with 3-D computer animation and composited into live action scenes with the actors. Nobody had done that and we did it for 22 episodes. Of course, we're talking mere minutes compared to what we do now on *Babylon 5*, because we were using a whole different type of computer then."

Not only is the production able to produce effects faster -- typically in just two weeks -- through the use of computers, but the end product, Copeland believes, is more realistic than traditional models. "We can actually go from a 150 kilometers away right up to something and look at the bulkheads on it. You can't do that with a model, because there isn't a stage big enough that would allow you to make such a shot in a single move."

It's also notable that *Babylon 5* features more visual effects footage per episode than any other series -- both past and present -- with a cumulative 90 minutes during the first season, 120 minutes in the second, "and a little bit better than that this year," according to Copeland.

Babylon 5's Virtual Studio

As well, *Babylon 5* has pioneered a concept called The Virtual Studio, in which key members of the production team are located around the globe and linked up via the Internet or other means.

The show's world-class original music score is created for each episode by LA-based composer Christopher Franke (formerly of Tangerine Dream), who conducts

his Berlin Symphonic Film Orchestra, located halfway around the world in Germany, in real time despite the 15-hour time difference. Making it possible are four fiber optic cables that connect the two studios, as well as video cameras and large-screen television screens on both ends.

Producers Strazynski and Copeland are able to monitor the progress of new special effects in development simply by dialing up Ron Thornton's Foundation Imaging studio over a modem. "We can check key frames and animation sequences -- or if they're designing a new ship that they want us to look at, we can pull up a frame of that and make comments about it before they go through the time intensive, expensive process of rendering a shot," Copeland recounts. As a result, Thornton and his crew rarely have to visit the set.

Emmy Award-winning matte artist Eric Chauvin resides and works in Washington state, yet is able to render all of *Babylon 5's* necessary matte paintings long-distance with only an occasional trip South. "We send him the film frames on 8mm digital tape. He then imports them into his Macintosh, does his painting using a program called Photoshop, and Fed Ex's the frames back to us on digital tape," Copeland says. Hopefully, the day will soon come when it is not necessary to courier raw materials between locations. In the meantime, Copeland explains, the Internet "is really a cowpath as far as transmission of real data" and only useful for conveying sketches and information.

Also through the miracle of modems, Straczynski is able to commission freelance scripts -- 17 to date (all during the show's first two seasons), with more to come next year -- from the best science fiction writers in the world, regardless of their location. Historically, television writers either had to live in Los Angeles, or days would be lost waiting for scripts to arrive by express mail.

The Babylon 5 Model

Altogether, the production's innovative approach to achieving feature film-quality production values on a fat-free budget has been dubbed *The Babylon 5 Model* within the industry.

Curious producers and studio executives are frequently given tours of the entire operation, including the production's state-of-the-art facility in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. A former manufacturing plant for swimming pool and hot tub pumps, the 70,000 square foot building was purchased by Babylonian Productions and converted into three sound stages and production offices in just nine weeks -- and ready for shooting on day one of week ten.

"What I've tried to do over the years is to verse myself in the technological tools that will provide us a better opportunity to successfully do our job for less money and save us as much time as we possibly can," explains Copeland -- who also serves as the Executive Vice President of Netter Digital Entertainment, Inc., and the supervising producer of their new science fiction children's series, "Hypernauts," which they are producing in association with creator Ron Thornton's Foundation Imaging, Inc., and Greengrass Productions, Inc., for ABC's Saturday morning line-up.

"To that end, we have an ADR booth here at the stage. So if we have to replace dialogue, if we have to loop any lines, we can get actors in between scenes. We don't have to schedule them on their day off and send them to a different place to record this stuff. We can also identify bad dialogue on the part of a guest actor and loop it before they get off the clock and we have to bring them back and pay them."

But technology aside, Copeland believes that they couldn't do what they do every week without the ingenuity and resourcefulness of their production team.

"We try to give people enough creative freedom to be able to take things in their own directions and refine them. Because if we're telling everybody exactly what to do, we've hire the wrong people for the job. Or we shouldn't be here, because we're inhibiting the creative process.

"Also, we try to make everybody feel like they have a vested interest in the show. We solicit contributions from everybody. Just because you're a grip doesn't mean you don't have a good idea about something. So we try to share the creative process with everyone involved. And it's been returned to us ten-fold. We've held onto probably 85% of our crew over three years, which is very unusual."

* * *



J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

The Creator of "Babylon 5"

For *Babylon 5's* third (and current) season, J. Michael Straczynski established a new benchmark in American television history. He became the **first individual to write every episode of a full 22-episode season for a one-hour dramatic series.**

Furthermore, when combined with the last five episodes of season two, Straczynski has in actuality scripted a total of **27 consecutive one-hour dramatic shows.** He is also scheduled to write the first four shows of the next season, before passing the torch (intermittently) to some of the highly-respected science fiction writers he has used in the past. As noteworthy, of *Babylon 5's* **66 produced episodes to date, Straczynski singularly has written 49 of them** (or approximately 75%).

Add to that the fact that he has simultaneously served as the executive producer of what many regard as the most ambitious science fiction series since Roddenberry's original "Trek" -- and the dual task can easily be seen as monumental.

"It's never been done before and I now can understand why, because just being the executive producer on the show is an 18-hour-a-day job and writing all the shows is a 16-hour-a-day job. So basically I've got a math problem," Straczynski laughs.

What possible explanation could there be for taking on such a formidable challenge?

"I kind of thought I might have to, but I didn't start off thinking I was going to do this," he says. "The problem is that the first year was like the introduction to the show, the characters, and the Babylon 5 universe, which allowed for a lot of stand-alone stories. The second year brought us a little more into the 5-year arc. During both, we were able to give good outside science fiction writers the threads of the story and let them come back with their own interpretation.

"But this year, the arc was really heating up. There were a lot of changes -- the chairs were being moved around a lot. And since I'm the only one who knows

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where the story is going, it was simply easier to do it myself. But," he adds, "we will be bringing in outside writers again next season, the moment the story settles down again."

As an executive producer, Straczynski supervises the monolithic details that comprise the rich and wondrous tapestry of what viewers have come to expect of *Babylon 5* -- spectacular space ships, elaborate costumes, a massive array of sets, sophisticated alien make-up effects, and eye-popping special visual effects. As well, he provides immeasurable input into the creation of each episode's memorable music score, the casting of noteworthy guest stars and unforgettable feature players, the creation of distinctive stories by outside scribes (when he isn't writing them himself), and the final polished editing of every on-air hour (along with producer John Copeland).

"I have total creative control over the show, which means I don't sleep a hell of a lot," Straczynski laughs.

But, he adds, "it is extremely rewarding. This is a town driven by committee -- and the last good things created by committee were Stonehenge and the Pyramids. Thanks to Warner Bros., *Babylon 5* from start to finish is one person's vision."

Hard as it is to believe, Straczynski has only been gainfully employed in the television industry since 1984. But during that time, he has written more than 140 produced episodes of television, and served as a story editor and/or producer on numerous shows, including such hits as "Murder, She Wrote," "The Twilight Zone," and "Jake and The Fatman."

Though only 41 years old, he has also published two novels, an anthology of short fiction, over 500 nonfiction articles and short stories, a dozen produced plays, another dozen produced radio dramas, and a classic text on screenwriting (of which a new, expanded edition will be appearing this Fall).

His remarkable resume also includes significant stints as a contributing editor and monthly screenwriting columnist for *Writer's Digest* magazine, a special correspondent to the *Los Angeles Times*, a staff reporter and writer for *Time, Inc.*, the host of a weekly two-hour science-fiction radio talk show in Los Angeles, the entertainment reviewer for a San Diego radio station, and the author of numerous classic comic books. And those are only the career highlights of what this "writer's writer" (as he has been termed by his peers) has done.

It's little wonder that Straczynski's Babylonian Productions partner Douglas Netter calls him "the most prolific writer I know. This man is always writing. That's what he does, that's what he loves to do." Netter should know. As the former head

of the MGM Studios and a successful independent television producer for the last 17 years, he has worked with the best of the best over the years.

How it all began for Joe Straczynski (as he is known by his friends and co-workers; or "JMS" by his Internet fans) is the stuff of which novels are made.

He grew up the son of a blue-collar plastics worker "who had a unique economic philosophy, which was blow into town, run up a lot of bills, and split. So, as a result, we were always on the move. Every six months to a year, we'd be in a different town or a completely different state. I went to a different school every year. We had different names that we lived under. Men would come in the middle of the night with badges, and we'd have to pack up and get out. It was that kind of existence."

Growing up, there were only two kinds of friends Straczynski could count on: television and public libraries. From television, he developed an early admiration for the work of Rod Serling, Paddy Chayefsky, and Harlan Ellison (Babylon 5's creative consultant and a long-time friend), among others. From his friendly library, he worked his way through every children's title by his pre-teens, and embarked on an adult literary odyssey in which he would revel in the legendary likes of Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, E. E. "Doc" Smith, and J. R. R. Tolkien.

As he explains of the origins of his unusually long and prolific career: "My entire life I knew I was going to be a writer. That was it. As a kid I collected paper clips and pens of different kinds -- 'I've got to get ready!' Then I hit 17, and I said, 'Okay, I've prepared enough. Now I'm going to start writing! So I've been writing and selling non-stop since I was 17 years old.'"

While still in high school, he wrote articles and plays. His first commissioned work was a full-length comedy written at the request of the school, which was performed in front of a full assembly. "Prior that, nobody noticed I existed," he recalls. "Suddenly, I was noticed."

His last year of high school, he started sending out one-act and full-length plays to various theaters. "One local theater decided to produce one of them, and sent a letter suggesting a meeting. I went to it, and they kept waiting for my dad to show up or something. Finally, I was able to convince them that no, I really was the person who wrote the play, and they did it," he says.

Working his way through various colleges, he had a full-length play performed for some 20 weeks in summer stock and later published in book form by a leading theatrical publisher. He also acquired degrees in sociology and psychology, with

minors in philosophy and literature, and taught creative writing at San Diego State University, while turning out articles for leading magazines and newspapers.

And then something possessed him to try his luck in Hollywood. He arrived on April Fools Day, 1981, one of the thousands who flock to Los Angeles each year without a single contact in the industry.

Armed only with a portfolio of freelance byline clippings, he quickly worked his way through the ranks of freelancers to staff writer, story editor, co-producer, producer, supervising producer -- and finally -- executive producer and creator of *Babylon 5*.

"Like everyone else in town, I began as a staff writer and I found that I would get rewritten all the time," he says. "So I asked, 'Who did that?' and found out that it was the story editor, and went for his job. Then when I was the story editor, I'd do a script and it would be rewritten. Who was it? The producer. So I went for his job, and eventually you work up to executive producer, and nobody rewrites you anymore. My style of writing is very personal and eccentric, and that was the only way to protect the words."

Perhaps, the most telling impact that Straczynski has had on the medium that he regards with such respect that he gave it *Babylon 5* is the significance of the following...

In early 1995, *Newsweek* magazine created a Who's Who of 50 of the "most influential thinkers-innovators who will shape our lives as we move into the 21st century." That elite group -- which it designated the "captains in the information revolution" -- included, not surprisingly, such figures as Steven Jobs (the co-founder of Apple and more recently of NeXT), Tim Berners-Lee (the inventor of the World Wide Web), and Kevin Kelly (the executive editor of *Wired*). But of all the individuals who have in one way or another moved the goal posts in film and television, there was only one name...that of **J. Michael Straczynski**.

Among the other honors which have come Straczynski's way are three prestigious nominations -- for a Writer's Guild Award and an Ace Award for his adaptation of the episode, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," on Showtime's "Nightmare Classics"; and an Academy of Canadian Television and Cinema Gemini Award for an episode of "Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future". He has also received the coveted Horror Writers of America's Bram Stoker Award for Best First Novel for his book, *Demon Night*.

Certainly, *Babylon 5* would have never earned its two Emmy Awards and three Emmy nominations -- as well as numerous other honors -- if it hadn't been for

Straczynski.

For Straczynski, writing could be called more of a preoccupation than an occupation. He works 10 hours a day, 7 days a week -- until 3 or 4 in the morning, exactly 362 days a year. The only time he takes off are his birthday, Christmas, and New Year's.

In fact, when he and his wife visited England several years ago, she told him, "No writing when you're over there." And I ended up getting a little notebook on the sly and hiding it in my pocket," he laughs. "By the time we got back, I had outlined my next novel." (Which he then wrote and sold within six months.)

Ask him why writing has become the all-consuming rite of his life, and Straczynski jokingly insists, "I'm an incompetent at everything else! My wife will verify this. I'm terrible at everything else. This is all I can do and I enjoy it -- slamming words together in combinations to see what kind of explosions come out of it."

Then he adds, more seriously: "If you said to me that I can't write anymore, there'd be a puff of purple smoke and I'd be gone. I would just cease to exist. So I'm always doing three or four or five things at the same time. And while working on this show, I was rewriting my textbook on writing. I get twitchy if I'm not writing something."

It's hard to imagine what television would be like today without such visionary wordsmiths as JMS.

A copy of Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction, featuring a recent article by Straczynski on the evolution of Babylon 5 and other topics, has been enclosed in this kit for further reference.